

HEPATITIS C

Arizona Department of Corrections
Health Service Bureau

Inmate Wellness Program
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You may have been infected with the hepatitis C virus (HCV) years ago. It can be hard to track since the infection usually has mild flu-like symptoms or no symptoms at all.

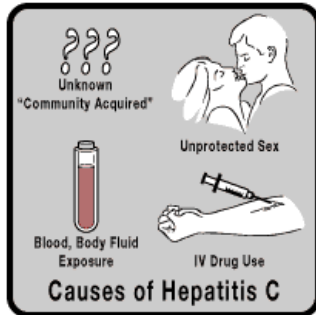
Although most people infected with HCV lead normal lives and never have symptoms, some people develop a chronic (or life-long) infection. During this time, there is an inflammation of the liver. This may cause some of the chemicals (or "enzymes") inside the liver leak out into the blood stream, which can be detected by a blood test.

Over time, this inflammation causes scarring of the liver (or "cirrhosis"). Most people have detectable enzymes but do not develop serious cirrhosis. However, some people will progress to liver failure, while others (especially those who drink alcohol) may develop cancer of the liver.

Don't forget to protect those around you, too. HCV is usually spread by blood-to-blood contact. Someone else has to get your blood directly into their body through sharing a needle, a razor, nail clippers, or a toothbrush, or anything that may have your blood on it. Even when blood is there, there also has to be an opening to get into the other person's body. Although it is possible for HCV to be sexually transmitted, you cannot spread HCV through hugging, kissing, sharing eating or drinking utensils, or sharing a bathroom.

Keep Your Liver Healthy

- Avoid using tobacco, street drugs or ANY alcohol. These will speed up the damage to your liver.
- Get immunized for hepatitis A and B. Infection with two types of hepatitis may speed up the scarring of your liver.
- Avoid over-the-counter medications such as Tylenol or multivitamins with iron. If needed, they may be taken in small amounts for a short time safely.
- Avoid foods that are high in salt, fat, and/or sugar.
- Ask healthcare staff to identify your ideal weight



range and take steps to get there (or stay there).

- Keep clean with regular hand washing and teeth brushing, and showers when available.
- If possible, rest when tired and try to minimize stress. For assistance, check out the sheets on Anxiety and Sleeping Guidelines (found in the Inmate Information Sheets Binders in the libraries or from the Health Unit).
- Drink at least 8 glasses of water a day and try to minimize beverages with lots of caffeine or sugar.
- Get active! Regular exercise will improve both your mental and physical health.

To Treat or Not to Treat?

There are treatments to get rid of HCV, but they don't work for everyone, and some people don't need treatment. Treatment is decided on an individual basis. It depends on several factors, such as how advanced the disease is, lifestyle behaviors (such as drug and alcohol use), mental health status, and age.

Talk with your medical provider about whether you need treatment. The medications approved to treat HCV include:

- Interferon - a medicine that you inject under the skin to fight HCV.
- Pegylated interferon - another type of interferon that lasts longer in the body and may work better.
- Ribavirin - a pill that helps fight HCV when used with interferon.

If you are diagnosed with HCV, talk with your healthcare provider to see what treatment options are the best choices for you.

Conclusion

Even though you have tested positive for HCV, you may not have a chronic infection. It is important to avoid risky behaviors such as drug use, alcohol use and tattooing. Get help for substance abuse or depression.

Making these lifestyle changes may be difficult, but keep in mind people infected with HCV can live normal lives for many years if they take care of their health. Take responsibility by getting informed and putting in HNR's to get your liver enzymes tested every 3 to 6 months.